



Correct “switchology” is critical in many maintenance tasks.

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By AT2 Eric Plunges

We just had returned home from a tri-site deployment and were getting comfortable back in Brunswick, Maine. At the end of our work shift on night check, one of our P-3Cs returned with an APS-115 radar gripe—the antenna alignment was off. We moved the aircraft inside the hangar because of the not-so-wonderful weather in Maine. We then built a plan—one we would regret before the night was over.

My supervisor and I decided to take a couple of junior ATs out with us to do the job. One technician had come to the shop right at the end of deployment, and the other one had been here for some time and was experienced with radar alignments.

In a microwave, a bag of popcorn takes three minutes to cook; your body just seconds.



It's Getting Hot


The two AT3s opened the aft radome, set up the stand, hooked up the ICS, and powered up the radar system, preparing for the alignment. I joined them on the aircraft and asked if everything was ready to go. The less-experienced tech gave me a thumbs up, and we started the alignment procedure. This function requires one person outside the aircraft and another maintainer inside. They must have ICS comms, and I took his word that everything was set up and good to go. I told the experienced tech to go outside for the antenna part of the alignment, and the other tech stayed inside with me. I wanted him to have hands-on training on the “inside” techniques for the job.

We began the process using the crew-station maintenance manual, and everything went fine until the AT3 adjusting the antenna said something over the ICS. Because of a loud squeal in the headset, we could not understand him. At that moment, my supervisor came into the plane to see how everything was going. I walked out of the aircraft and went to the radome so I could hear what the tech on the stand was saying. He said, “It’s getting hot up here.” Upon hearing this, I yelled to my supervisor at the top of the aircraft boarding ladder to turn the radar from him, and I went back into the plane.

Once at the radar controls, I made sure the DUMMY/ANT switch was in the safe (or DUMMY) position. The dummy-load light was not on as it was supposed to be, so I pushed the DUMMY/ANT switch, and the light came on. We suddenly realized the tech-

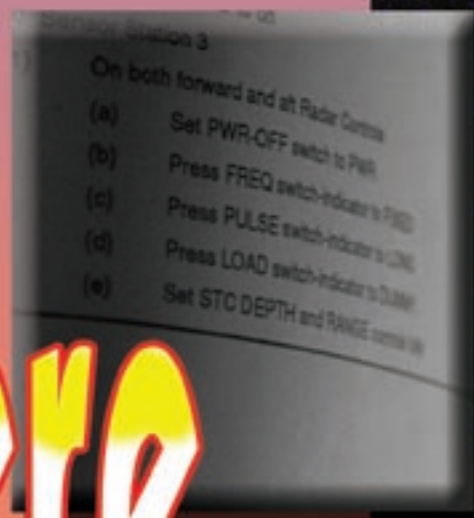
nician outside the aircraft had been radiated. Neither my supervisor nor I had noticed this problem.

I should have checked the dummy light and should have done a light test before beginning the procedure. I stopped the alignment and checked to make sure the outside tech was OK. He said he felt good and now felt a lot cooler. We sent him to medical, and he came away with a clean bill of health.

We were lucky he wasn’t harmed more seriously. I learned that being trusted as a CDI and being in charge of a job means I should have been involved from start to finish and should have been in control of the situation. I took an inexperienced person’s word that everything was “good to go” and didn’t check it myself. Technicians make mistakes, and inexperienced techs make even more. I let down a lot of people that day, but I did learn to follow established procedures, step by step. Had I followed that simple bit of advice, you wouldn’t be reading this story. 

Petty Officer Plunges works in the avionics shop at VP-26.

The author knows a quick look at the book could have prevented this near-miss.



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